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# *The ITT Affair: From Burlesque to Grotesque*

The friends and supporters of the Nixon administration on the Senate Judiciary Committee have paid a heavy price—and might have paid a far heavier one—for the partisan, tactical maneuvering which had made the cross-examination of Mrs. Dita Beard a condition precedent to further hearings on the nomination of Mr. Richard Kleindienst to be Attorney General. By all accounts they were exceedingly lucky that her sudden heart seizure under the pressure of questioning was relatively mild and that the farce being played out at her bedside on Sunday did not turn into tragedy. Mrs. Beard's health ought now to be reason enough to persuade the Republicans on the committee to postpone their examination of her, and to allow the full judiciary committee to return to the serious business at hand. If not, perhaps such testimony as she was able to give at the bedside hearing will discourage them from pursuing this line of inquiry further because she was, as might have been foreseen, an unconvincing witness, at best, for the defense of either the Nixon administration or ITT.

Her denial that she wrote the so-called Anderson memorandum was not new; she had already signed an affidavit to that effect. As for the rest of her testimony, it is hard to make much of it, in the absence of further guidance from ITT as to when, precisely, she is, and is not to be believed—when her disavowals carry weight, and when she is "irrational" or "disturbed" or suffering from "mental lapses" or "drinking excessively." For example, she made it quite clear that although she didn't author the Anderson memo, she did write something on the subject which was different from the memo which ITT now offers as the one-and-only "genuine" memorandum on the subject. If so, this does not say much for the integrity of ITT.

Moreover, if we are supposed to credit her disavowal of the Anderson memorandum—a full three weeks after she had every chance to do so, and didn't—then we must equally believe her when she tells of a conversation with an unidentified White House aide which materially alters the picture we have been given by the administration and the Republican National Committee and ITT of the extent to which ITT was preparing to support the Republican Party this year. We had been told by ITT President Harold Geneen that $200,000 was involved, all of it connected with the promotion of ITT hotel properties in San Diego, and with the Republican Convention there. Other Republican figures have conceded that the figure might have been as high as $300,000 or $400,000. But now, in Denver, Mrs. Beard has introduced the figure of $600,000, and raised the possibility that some part of it might go directly into financing President Nixon's own campaign for re-election. Now that, assuming you believe it, puts rather a different light on things; it involves the White House and the President, who was supposed to be in no way involved, in a much more handsome gift from ITT at a time when that corporation's fate lay in the hands of a Republican administration.

For our part, we don't know what to believe, except that either you believe Mrs. Beard or you don't—you can't be selective about it. The best way out of this dilemma, we would think, is to put the Beard memorandum to one side and move on with the Senate's inquiry; the substance of the ITT affair, after all, has been amply documented in other testimony and far more significant witnesses are awaiting call—White House aide Peter Flanigan, for example, or Mr. Richard Ramsden, the private expert whose report, arranged by Mr. Flanigan, is said to have had so much to do with persuading the antitrust chief of the time, Richard McLaren, to settle the ITT cases out of court.

It is apparently Senator Hart's view that "clearly it will inhibit" the Judiciary Committee if Mrs. Beard cannot be questioned further and that as a result "we may never know the truth." In our view, not knowing the truth about the Beard memorandum, while perhaps tantalizing, can hardly inhibit the Senate for there is almost nothing in that memorandum, in the way of assertions or allegations, which has not been sworn to in other, more reliable, testimony. In short, that part of the ITT affair which has to do with the reliability of Mrs. Dita Beard has been allowed by the Judiciary Committee to proceed from burlesque to the grotesque. If the Senate is serious about seeking out the truth, it should get back to that part of the ITT affair which has to do, narrowly, with the fitness of Mr. Kleindienst to be Attorney General and, in a larger sense, with the integrity of the government of the United States.